

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 04871 170034Z POSS DUPE
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CA-01 CIAE-00 INR-10
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R 161120Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9952
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
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INS WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 4871

INS/CO FOR CODEP (COEXM)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF
SUBJECT: DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN OFFICIALS OF THE UNHCR AND THE
THAI MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

REF: BANGKOK 4167

1. LESLIE A. GOODYEAR, UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR
WESTERN SOUTH ASIA, INFORMED US OF DISCUSSIONS HELD IN
EARLY FEBRUARY WITH MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OFFICIALS.
THE OCCASION WAS THE VISIT OF GILBERT JAEGER, DIRECTOR
OF THE PROTECTION DIVISION AT UNHCR, GENEVA. (REFTEL
RECOUNTS JAEGER'S CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR.)
GOODYEAR AND JAEGER TALKED WITH DAMRONG SUNTHONSARATHUN,
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION; AND POLICE
MAJOR GENERAL SISAK THAMMARAK, DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY.
THE UNHCR RAISED THE FOLLOWING ISSUES: RECENT INCI-
DENTS IN SONGKHLA; THE ROUNDING UP LAST SUMMER OF
SOME 3000 CAMBODIANS WHO HAD LONG BEEN RESIDENT
IN THE ARANYAPRATHET AREA AND PLACING THEM IN THE
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CAMP; SCREENING PROCEDURES FOR OVERLAND REFUGEES WHO
HAVE ARRIVED SINCE NOVEMBER 15; AND CROSS BORDER
ACTIVITIES FROM UBON.

2. GOODYEAR SAID THAT DAMRONG HAD CHARACTERIZED SOME
OF THE RECENT HORROR STORIES FROM SOUTH THAILAND
(BANGKOK 2712) AS BASED ON UNFOUNDED RUMORS. THE

PRIME MINISTER, IN HIS CAPACITY AS MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR, HAD NEVERTHELESS RECENTLY SENT A LETTER TO THE SONGKHLA GOVERNOR URGING A MORE HUMANITARIAN APPROACH TO REFUGEES. THE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVES ASKED WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT COULD CHANGE ITS INSTRUCTIONS TO FISHERMEN. (THEY ARE CURRENTLY LIABLE TO FINES AND POSSIBLE JAILING IF THEY BRING IN REFUGEES.) THE REPLY WAS THAT THE MINISTRY COULD NOT ENCOURAGE FELLOW THAI TO BREAK THE LAW BY ABETTING THE ENTRY OF ILLEGAL ALIENS. JAEGER POINTED OUT THAT WHATEVER HAPPENS TO BOAT CASE REFUGEES IN THE SOUTH SOON BECOMES PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE.

3. JAEGER THEN RAISED THE ISSUE OF 3000 INDIVIDUALS IN ARANYAPRATHET WHO HAD BEEN LIVING MANY YEARS IN THAILAND BUT HAD NEVERTHELESS BEEN ROUNDED UP THE PREVIOUS SUMMER AND PLACED IN THE CAMP. THE THAI EXPLAINED, UNCONVINCINGLY TO THE UNHCR, THAT THESE INDIVIDUALS HAD GONE BACK TO CAMBODIA AFTER THE WAR AND THEN RETURNED TO THAILAND. THEY WERE THEREFORE REFUGEES. UNHCR OFFICIALS ASKED FOR A READING ON THE EIGHT REFUGEES AT ARANYAPRATHET WHO HAD BEEN MARCHED OUT OF CAMP IN CHAINS DURING THE NIGHT, AND THEN TRANSFERRED TO A MILITARY CAMP WHERE THEY HAD NOT BEEN HEARD FROM SINCE. THE THAI HAD NO ANSWER. GOODYEAR MENTIONED TO US THAT THEY

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HAD BROUGHT UP THIS ISSUE LARGELY TO GET THE MESSAGE ACROSS THAT THE UNHCR WAS INTERESTED IN SUCH EVENTS.

4. THE UNHCR ONCE MORE ASKED ABOUT SCREENING PROCEDURES FOR POST-NOVEMBER 15 OVERLAND ARRIVALS. THE THAI SAID THEY WERE IN THE PROCESS OF MODIFYING THESE PROCEDURES IN THE LIGHT OF EXPERIENCE, BUT WERE NOT SPECIFIC ON THE MODIFICATIONS.

5. THE UNHCR THEN BROUGHT UP THE SHIFTING POPULATION IN THE UBON CAMP. GOODYEAR AND JAEGER POINTED OUT THAT CROSS BORDER ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED FROM THE CAMP WERE AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE UNHCR WHICH HAD RESPONSIBILITY FOR CARE AND FEEDING OF THE REFUGEES. THE UNHCR COULD NOT APPEAR TO BE SUPPLYING FOOD TO RESISTANCE FORCES. THAI OFFICIALS REPLIED THAT THERE WAS NO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGEMENT OF SUCH ACTIVITIES BUT PERHAPS LOCALLY DIRECTED ACTIONS ARE TAKING PLACE.

WHITEHOUSE

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